

Light Dawns Over Asia

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First Adventist Filipino Church Established

On the morning of March 11, 1911, Finster gave the honor to the visiting president of the Asiatic Division, I. H. Evans, to administer the rite of baptism to the first twelve Filipino converts. That night the first Adventist Church in the Philippines was organized with twelve members. The membership comprised the twelve converts, six other Filipinos who were accepted by profession of faith, and the four missionaries--the Finsters and the Caldwells.

Eight came from one household. They were Camilo Panis and his wife Ciriaca, their only daughter Teodora, their nephew Bibiano Panis, their nieces, Maria Panis, Catalina Nery, and Pilar Espino, and a boarder, Leon Roda.

Two were another husband and his wife: Felix Manalo and his wife Tomasa. Two were a certain Mrs. Morales and her daughter. (No one could remember the first name of Mrs. Morales and her daughter.) They lived in Paco, a district adjacent to Santa Ana. It is interesting to note that Manalo's wife, Tomasa, was also from Paco.

The rest of the first converts could be considered *kababayans* (fellow countrymen) of the Panises, as they were all from Santa Ana. They were Anteria dela Cruz, Apolonio de Jesus, Consuelo Manalo, Diego Elioterio, Jose Castro and Marcelino Pelajo.

Felix Manalo and the Adventist Church

Manalo's connection with the Adventist Church was shortlived. Sometime in the early part of 1911 he became aware of the cottage meetings and many Bible studies that Finster was conducting in Santa Ana and Paco. At that time he was working as an evangelist of the Christian Mission Church (*Misyon Cristiana*), with members in Santa Ana. He spread the word around that he would prove Finster wrong. It was possible that some of his members were among those attending Finster's meetings.

One night, he came to the meeting and began raising objections to what he knew was the Adventist teaching on the law, with special emphasis on the seventh-day Sabbath. Finster later remembered Manalo's very excited and very aggressive manner of presenting his points. But after Finster had answered him on the long list of objections that he had raised, he calmed down and within earshot of those present he said, "You know that man is right."

Manalo as an Adventist Worker

Finster immediately started an informal two-month Bible institute to train prospective Filipino workers from his recent converts. With the need to train "national workers who know the language and who understand their own people," and to build "an indigenous church, not a foreign church," he tried to

impress upon these young people that the burden of carrying this last message to the Philippines must rest with the Filipino people themselves.

The two senior high school students were Bibiano Panis and Leon Roda, and the two ministers were Felix Manalo and Guillermo Dionicio, who is believed to have been one of the converts to the Church after its organization on March 11. Finster recalled that there were only two ministers of other denominations that were won by his ministry in the Philippines.

Manalo became a regular worker of the Adventist Church not very long after attending the Bible institute. Finster wrote in an article of the "native pastor" who tried to prove him wrong and whom he identified as Manalo.

It would take at least two or three months before an article, coming from a distance like that of the Philippines, to appear in the Church's world paper in those days. It is reasonable to believe that Manalo was already a regular worker in June of 1911. E. M. Adams, who arrived on January 2, 1912, found him already a member of the mission staff.

During the remaining months of 1911, the activities of the few workers were confined in Manila. Then sometime in December, a call for workers came from Malolos, Bulacan. A newly converted public school teacher in Manila began sharing his new-found faith with his relatives and friends in his hometown, Malolos. He was Emilio Manalaysay.

Finster arranged for Panis and Manalo to start cottage meetings in Malolos. After the meetings started, Panis was called back in early January 1912 to translate for Finster, as he launched his first tent meetings in Manila. Manalo was left alone to continue the evangelistic meetings in Malolos where he stayed not only until a church was organized but also until his separation from the Adventist Church on August 25, 1913. Adams, who organized the group that Manalo raised in Malolos into a church, and who headed the work in the Philippines when Finster left on furlough in 1912 and 1913, said that the two places where Manalo was assigned during the approximately two years he worked for the Adventist Church, were Manila and Malolos. Two living members of that group attribute to Manalo the raising of the first church in Malolos. These two also testify that Manalo's residence was in Malolos until his separation from the Church and his starting of his own which he called *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

Manalo and His Separation from the Adventist Church

Iglesia ni Cristo historians say that Manalo left the Adventist Church of his own volition and on theological grounds. According to *Pasugo* of July 27, 1964, during a conference of Adventist ministers in Malolos in the middle of 1913, Manalo "raised some questions on certain doctrines and practices of Seventh-day Adventists. The discussion degenerated into a heated argument. Felix Manalo resigned and took his wife back to Manila."

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The *Iglesia ni Cristo* sources further note that prior to this conference, Manalo had confided to his second wife, Honorata, that he was planning to start a new church and that he would attempt to persuade his fellow Adventist ministers and ministers of other sects to join him. But he failed to win his fellow Adventist ministers who called him *kolorum* ("subversive"). Because of this, Manalo resigned from the Adventists.

Adventists, on the other hand, say that the above reasons were only partly true. They assert that Manalo did not resign, but that there were circumstances that in 1913 forced the Adventist Church to drop him from its employment and from its membership roll.

They do not deny the fact that Manalo was plotting to start a new church while carrying on as a minister in good standing with the Adventist Church. Adams recalled a workers' meeting where Manalo requested time to speak. "He confessed that he had worked against me; even before I arrived, he told the other workers that he would not work with me, and that he was trying to lead an independent movement. That was not news to the other workers."

After Manalo's wife, Tomasa, died late in 1912, he began courting a young Adventist woman from Manila, Honorata de Guzman. With the help of three other Adventist ladies, he succeeded in eloping with her, which was definitely not acceptable.

Aggravating circumstances with Manalo were: (1) he was a minister and thus was expected to set an example of proper Christian conduct; and (2) the elopement was on a Sabbath.

Manalo was suspended temporarily from his work; and the church in Malolos where he had his membership held his case in abeyance, prior to receiving counsel from Evans, then president of the Asiatic Division. Evans suggested that he be taken back into the work.

The couple proceeded to Malolos. Manalo continued his ministerial work, but probably resented his temporary suspension. It could be that in this short period, between June and August of 1913, Manalo's plan of starting another church and winning his fellow Adventist ministers to his side, was crystallized. He came out into the open and sought to persuade his fellow Adventist ministers to join him. These actions may have caused someone to recommend that his home church take an action on his original offense, that of his elopement. On August 25, 1913, the church in Malolos voted to disfellowship Manalo.

After Manalo was disfellowshipped, he and his wife did not immediately leave their residence in Malolos. They continued to live in the home of Donato Galang, one of the church's deacons. He still had the sympathy of many members of the congregation. These members recognized that elopement was not proper, especially of a minister; but they also recognized that elopement was an accepted social practice among Filipinos, especially if it culminated in marriage.

Mrs. Donato Galang said that there were a number of them who agreed to give him support, even to the extent of giving him their tithes. Manalo had been persuasive enough to win a segment of the church in Malolos to his side. When Finster arrived in Manila from his furlough in November of 1913, he found Manalo bent on establishing his own church.

Finster's Fruitful Furlough

In the latter part of 1912, the Finsters were able to take a much needed furlough. Mrs. Finster was sick. They had not seen their homeland since they left Australia in 1902. And those ten years, especially the last four years spent in the Philippines, were extremely busy. E. M. Adams, who arrived with his wife in January of 1912, noted that "he was carried too much." Besides doing all the evangelistic work, he was manager and bookkeeper of the "mission" while at the same time preparing tracts and papers in Tagalog for distribution. But his furlough was not less busy.

Finster had four projects which he felt would answer the pressing needs of the Filipinos who were receptive to the message. The first was to invite at least five more missionary families to return with him. He informed the delegates and leaders assembled in session at the General Conference of 1913 that the work had been confined to the Tagalog regions of the Philippines, but that "the doors are open for us to enter in all these different islands and the Lord calls us now to delay no longer."

His second project was to set up a printing press. He presented to the assembled congregations the tremendous need for literature in the dialects of the people, and the difficulties of having commercial presses produce books for colporteurs. He said that many sales were lost because when dates of delivery came, the books were not available.

His third goal was the raising of funds for a meeting place with a sitting capacity of at least 300 in the city of Manila. This hall was to serve both as a chapel for the local church and a convention hall for all the believers in Luzon. His final objective was to get funds for building headquarters, also in Manila.

When Finster returned to the Philippines in October 1913, he had almost achieved his goals. The General Conference gave him four missionary couples: the Carlos Fatteberts, the Robert Stewarts, the Roy Hays, and the W. E. Laniers. A few months later, Fausto Jornada, a Filipino immigrant to the U.S., followed.

Because the General Conference did not have the funds for a printing press and for two buildings, Finster was allowed to solicit funds from the churches in the U.S. So he visited the churches where he had labored before his call in 1902 to be a missionary in Australia. He even sought invitations to speak in non-Adventist congregations where he succeeded in soliciting funds. Out of the funds he received during his furlough, Finster was able to buy a